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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - President Bush to India
PARIS - Friday, March 03, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

President Bush to India

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

The "folly" of the French public reacting to the threat of Avian Flu leads several dailies to bemoan France's "hysterics" as their cover stories.

But today's lead international story is the nuclear deal signed by the U.S. with India. Le Figaro headlines "American Green Light to Nuclear India" and calls the agreement "historic." Bruno Tertrais of the Foundation for Strategic Research is interviewed in Le Figaro: "The difference in treatment can be explained by two sets of differences, political and legal. Iran has signed the NTP, India has not. And France and the U.S. consider that for the time being, India's ambitions are in accordance with their own." Liberation notes on its front page: "India in the Nuclear Club" and interviews a regional expert on "America's interest in India:" "The U.S. considers India a natural ally and the White House secretly rejoices over its growing international role. whereas with China, relations are more constrained. The U.S. is afraid that China might want to marginalize America's role in Asia. But the nuclear agreement with India is not part of a plan against China. It is not in the interest of either the U.S. or India. The U.S. government is convinced that the balance of economic power is shifting towards Asia." Several editorials in regional outlets comment on this "historic" deal, on double standards, Pakistan and Iran. (See Part C)

Agence France Presses wires report President Chirac welcomed the U.S.-India civilian nuclear cooperation agreement signed on Thursday. He sees it as representing "progress for non-proliferation" and for "the fight against global warming."

Le Monde, reporting on the most recent Council of Europe report on CIA renditions, points to its "reserved" conclusions. "Without being able to confirm the existence of the CIA's secret detention sites in Europe, which the Washington Post had posited in November 2005.... the report denounces the lack of control on foreign secret agents in Europe." In France, a judicial inquiry has been opened to investigate whether a CIA plane transited the Bourget airport in July 2005.

Agence France Presse wires briefly report that Interior Minister Sarkozy met with U.S. Attorney General Gonzales to discuss the war on terror as well as biometric passports. The two men raised "transatlantic relations, bilateral cooperation...in intelligence matters on terrorism and various forms of trafficking," said a member of Sarkozy's office.

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

President Bush to India

"Goodbye Nehru."

Olivier Picard in regional Les Dernieres Nouvelles D'Alsace (03/03): "Calling the nuclear deal between Indian and the U.S. 'historic' is not out of place. This is indeed a spectacular rapprochement between America and a former non-aligned nation. The agreement signals the pragmatism which is marking the start of this new century. The White House is ready to make concessions in order to establish its new international order in this region of the world. The fact that it also helps to promote American products is obviously a plus. These advantages are well worth closing one's eyes to the fact that India has not signed the NPT, whereas Iran and North Korea have. The Bush administration is not hearing comments about nuclear double standards. But how will President Bush be able to keep Pakistan from demanding similar treatment?"

"Counter Model"

Patrick Sabatier in left-of-center Liberation (03/03): "In signing this historic agreement, President Bush has killed two birds with one stone. He is reminding all that in nuclear matters, double standards are the rule. We can and we must grant India what we refuse Iran and Pakistan. In so doing, he has granted India a special role as the counter model to China. While India shares China's demographic development, it has assets which China does not have, such as civil liberties. In the battle between totalitarianism and democracy on the road to power and prosperity in Asia, the choice is in favor of the Elephant, as everyone waits for the Dragon to slough its skin."

"India's Appeal"

Jean-Marcel Bouguereau in regional La Republique du Centre (03/03): "If India is so appealing it is because it is becoming one of the world's major powers, and is a newly arrived member of the UNSC. But mostly it is the only nation that can in time be a counterweight to the Chinese dictatorship, which America mistrusts so completely. India, contrary to China, is a stable democracy, and by signing yesterday's historic agreement with the U.S. it has taken one more step towards its dreams of power."

"Double Standards?"

Joseph Limagne in regional Ouest France (03/03): "New Delhi has the bomb, but has not signed the NPT; Iran which has signed it, does not have the bomb yet. India has not made improper use of the bomb, and continues to deserve its reputation as the world's largest democracy, while Iran's stance raises serious doubts. It is good that India has ceased to be a rogue state and accepts its nuclear program to be scrutinized. But this small step in one direction carries its own perverse consequences: Pakistan is demanding the same treatment. And while Pakistan may be an American ally in the fight against terrorism, it does not offer the same security as India in nuclear issues. And of course Iran and North Korea will soon join the chorus using the argument of double standards."

"From India to Iran"

Jean-Christophe Ploquin in Catholic La Croix (03/03): "George W. Bush is going all out to counter China's growing power. India is part of Washington's strategy to counter Chinese military and economic expansionism. Yesterday's agreement appears to be a good thing for both parties as well as for France, which hopes to sell several nuclear reactors to India. And Iran is among the nations that will feel encouraged by the agreement." STAPLETON